Life In Grey

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Life In Grey

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Summary

In a world where people only see in greys and muted tones until they meet their soulmates, Will has known who his is for decades. But in a reality where Alana Bloom agrees to be Will's paddle, where the Shrike is caught before he can kill and injure Louise and Abigail Hobbs, in a world where the Chesapeake Ripper is never caught, when will they finally meet?

For the Reverse Bang, with my wonderful artist Oscarthegrouch! I loved their ideas and had such a great time writing for their fab art!

Notes

NB: The minor character death is for Louise Hobbs (Abigail's mum)

See the end of the work for more notes

1993

Will Graham ran his fingers over the crime scene photos in the textbook.

They danced in front of his eyes in such an odd way.

There were colours. Proper colours not the muted ones he'd always lived with.

"It's beautiful…" He found himself muttering, his heart pounding at both the sight of it, and the implications. He would know Il Mostro anywhere.

1997

Hannibal blinked. Uncertain at first.

Perhaps it was a migraine coming on after a long shift in the ER. Or maybe just a trick of his tired eyes. But no. He looked again.

The news article was practically vivid. Or as far as he could tell, with the limited frame of reference with which to give it a description. Rather than the muted, near grey, colours of the world he lived in. These were brighter, mesmerising.

He skimmed the article before going back to the beginning and reading it in depth. The Bayou Butcher they were calling the killer, an unimaginative nom de plume, given for where the victims had been found. But it was far from butchery.

The victim in this case, the sixth in a twelve month period, was a known drug dealer and abuser of women, which went to the motivation of the killer perhaps? But what they had done with the body

was beyond anything he'd ever seen before, that wasn't at his own hand.

The victim had been found in a bayou, yes. But not merely dumped in the swamps, weighed down and lost to a secret decomposition. No, the man had been wired through with lab equipment, his body opened up and turned into a miniature meth lab and set afloat in a small boat ready for locals to find.

And although the descriptions weren't overly graphic, and the photos of the article - bright as they were - only showed evidence bags being removed by the police, Hannibal could imagine it completely. Or at least he could imagine how it would look if he had done it.

He had been unable to visualise these tableaux before. He had been reading about this killer with keen interest but descriptions had not been enough and these were the first pictures that were more than just photos of the victims.

There was a lot of speculation as to this change in MO, or perhaps this was a copycat. Other kills previously attributed to the Bayou Butcher had been eerily beautiful - the victims wound into reeds, or planted in the swamps in such a way that they returned to nature as it broke down and reclaimed their bodies to nourish the-

Hannibal's mouth twitched into a smile. Of course. Yes, this was the Butcher, beyond a doubt. A killer who disposed of bodies back to the earth was not about to pollute the unique ecosystem of the area by dumping a body full of chemicals and toxins.

A thoughtful and selective killer. An intelligent psychopath.

Hannibal felt his chest swell at the thought and tried not to consider the implications of any of this. He clenched his jaw and looked away from the article, out of the window. Watching the birds fly calmly in the pale and pastel tones of the world.

He'd assumed he'd never see it in a different way. Not thinking for one minute that there was a soul mate out there for him. He liked to count himself as quite unique, so the probability seemed slim. Hannibal had resigned himself to a life in grey. Everything grey with that little hint of colour which, despite having known nothing different, everyone knew wasn't quite right. Like a larger palette was just beyond grasp for the vast majority.

And it was of course.

If one met their soulmate, then the true colours of the world would become visible. A quirk not only of their own species but studies had found that it appeared to be true of all large apes and perhaps dogs, dolphins, lower primates. It was a combination of hormonal and pheremonal levels in balance with the natural chemistry of the planet. Science had revealed this, though for many centuries it was taken to be witchcraft and other mysticism. Humans were curious enough to turn it into an area of study, each born with an innate sense that the colours of their world weren't quite right.

Hannibal took in the flicker of vibrant colour that teased across the page. He had never heard of this before, but Soul-Centric Science had never been his field of interest, so perhaps it had been documented before. He'd need to look it up.

In the meantime he had to allow that he was intrigued by the Bayou Butcher, at the very least.

2015

Will took a shuddering breath and braced himself before opening the case file.

The Chesapeake Ripper.

The only reason he'd agreed to Jack Crawford's request to work in the field.

Sure it had been Hobbs they had been looking for in the beginning, but once they had caught the Minnesota Shrike, he might have been able to quit. But he didn't. Because the whole time Jack had been talking in his classroom, and then the meeting with him and Alana Bloom in Jack's office Will had been thinking about the Ripper.

After failed attempts to become a full agent due to his perceived instability, this was finally his chance. He had worked his whole life towards this. His fascination with serial killers might have started as just as personal interest, an exploration of his own character in some ways. But that had led him to the police force, to studying criminology, to discovering the crimes of the Chesapeake Ripper. Or more accurately, Il Mostro.

Will would have known them to be the same killer even had it not been for the one thing both possessed - crime scenes in colour. The same colours he'd been seeing since he first read about the Florence based killer, now here in the US. And so, so close.

So close for years and yet beyond apprehension by the authorities. Mostly because Will omitted as much as possible to keep the FBI from getting to the Ripper first. Essentially carrying on two investigations - his own, and the redacted version for the FBI, which constantly kept him a step behind.

He fingered the edge of the paper as he soaked in the colour of the crime scene, wondering if the blood of his own victims was so red as that. He took a shuddering breath. He hadn't killed in years now. Not since he'd found another way to try and find Il Mostro, given that his love letters in the bayou - his own tableaux - went unanswered.

Will looked up at the loud knock at his office door, registering that there had been a couple of quieter knocks first.

"Come in," He called out gruffly as he closed the file and placed it to one side of his desk.

"Hi, um… Agent Graham I don't know if you remember me…" A young woman cautiously opened the door and stepped in, looking cautious rather than nervous.

"Abigail Hobbs? Of course I remember you," Will replied warmly and couldn't help but smile. "Come in! How are you, how's your mother?"

He stood to greet her and usher her to one of the seats he kept for students. She didn't look as young as she had that day they'd met, over two years ago now. She looked older than her years, but he guessed seeing the FBI shoot her serial killer dad did that to a girl. Will was just grateful that Hobbs hadn't had chance to react when Will and Alana had gone to his house. They had been following a paperwork discrepancy but Will had known. And Hobbs had realised that the moment he'd opened the door, but Will's gun was on him and the second he grabbed for the knife and lunged it was over.

"Good, we're good. We moved… things were a bit… People were…"

"Assholes?" Will prompted.

Abigail grinned at that, "yeah, that about sums it up. I just… I'm sorry to drop in on you like this. Doctor Bloom said you wouldn't mind." Abigail said tentatively.

"Alana Bloom?" Will cocked his head, curious.

"Yeah she, um. We stayed in touch. Actually, she's my therapist." There was still hesitation there and Will nodded, another smile.

"Oh. Well, that's good. She certainly has an understanding of… what happened, that others might not."

Abigail seemed to brighten at that, as though she'd been worried he might judge her in some way. He had a sense from her that she felt caught up in her own history and that moving forward for her meant clinging tightly to past connections. Such as Alana and, apparently himself.

"Are you well? Alana mentioned you'd been sick. That you were in the hospital," Abigail bit her lower lip, clearly unsure if she'd overstepped.

Will smiled, "Alana regularly makes conversation about me?"

"Oh, no. It, um, came up in passing. When I was asking her about talking to you and she mentioned you'd been sick but were on the mend."

Will nodded and couldn't help but find the girl endearing, "I'm well now, thank you." He was going to leave it at that, abrupt as it was, as he would with anyone else. But at her clear and keen concern he continued, "I had encephalitis. Luckily Alana noticed some of the symptoms and when I had a seizure she took me to the ER and were able to quickly find the cause thanks to her observations."

"Oh, well I'm glad they were able to help you so fast," Abigail offered a small smile but was clearly still pressed by whatever business she was on.

"What was it you wanted to see me about?" Will pushed, his empathy and insight had only taken him so far, so he was momentarily surprised when she replied -

"I want to, um… apply for the FBI. In the future I mean, after I graduate college. I just wanted some insight, maybe a… mentor? I mean, I know this is kinda weird and maybe inappropriate so it's okay if you say no." Abigail held direct eye contact with him despite her fidgeting and Will found he couldn't look away from the intensity of the gaze, finding something of himself in there. A kinship of a kind despite or perhaps because of the challenge it held.

"Okay, well… That's an interesting development. Tell me, why do you want to join the FBI?" Will asked, not letting the eye contact be lost.

"I, uh… I want to help people. And-"

"The real reason Abigail," Will interrupted firmly.

She glared at him for a moment, heat rising in her cheeks just as she rose to the challenge. “Because I understand how killers work, and because I can’t imagine going the rest of my life in a job that doesn’t use that, doesn’t allow for me to explore it further. Doesn’t allow me to become myself to my full potential.”

Will’s mouth lifted into a smirk and he gave her a curt nod, “Okay Miss Hobbs, we have a standing appointment for Monday evenings at 7pm, here in my office. Come prepared to go over your class notes and take onboard my feedback. I have no doubt you’ll do just fine at the Academy, but we need to get you in first. No cancellations and no tardiness.”

Abigail’s expression split into a wide, joyful smile.

2019

Hannibal pursed his lips as he read over the article, realising he was doing so, he flattened his expression and folded the paper.

The Virginia Lure they were calling the killer, apt he supposed. He couldn't call it a sad indictment of the authorities that they clearly hadn’t linked this Virginia Lure with the Bayou Butcher murders. It seemed all too obvious to him that the murderer was one and the same. But how could he be concerned with their lack of realisation when the same lack of insight in their ranks helped him remain a free man?

Hannibal had been aware that the killer was one and the same before the crime scene photos had been released. And then it was doubly clear, as the rich and vivid colours lifted from the page and seemed to nourish him.

It had been years since he had seen the evidence of the killer he had accepted must be his soulmate. He felt renewed in a way he hadn’t known he’d needed, just at the very reassurance of the Butcher’s continued existence.

He had to wonder whether it was a coincidence that this murder took place a month after his most recent sounder. The first time he himself had killed in quite some years - though quite necessarily for the gala dinner he had been hosting.

There was something of a message in the tableau, or so it felt.

He couldn’t miss how the victim - a murderer let off on a technicality - had been posed, though it seemed to have so far escaped the notice of the authorities.

It had taken a moment of inspection of the crime scene photo, a hotel room very precisely set up, coupled with a description of how the body was found - sat in a chair looking as though he were watching the world go by, for him to understand what this was.

Initially, the remarkable and immediate resemblance Hannibal felt to an Edward Hopper painting, had been amusing.

But there was something deeper, he was sure. A call back to something of Florence.

Yes, I saw your Primavera, but this is more my taste in art.

And with that the implication that, just as Hannibal knew the Virginia Lure to be the Bayou Butcher, his would-be soulmate knew the Chesapeake Ripper to be Il Mostro.

Hannibal felt a wonderful shiver run through his body.

If this really was a message from his soulmate then communication had been opened and perhaps he could send a message back?

Hannibal set aside the thoughts for later, checking the time and knowing that any moment his patient would arrive. An engaging and intelligent young FBI agent that had recently been referred to by his colleague Alana Bloom, who was taking a sabbatical to start a family. He had hardly been in a position to say no to her referrals, despite wishing that several of them he had, given that he had introduced Alana to her wife. A chance meeting at one of his dinner parties had been all it taken to kindle something between the good doctor and the Verger heiress, who he had suspected was considering engaging him as a therapist. That didn't happen, neither did the fling that he had been cultivating the seeds of between himself and Alana.

He wasn't disappointed, but it was an unfortunate waste of an opportunity, given that linking himself to lovers had been one of the best forms of cover and sources of alibi over the years.

Nonetheless, things had worked out how they had, and Abigail Hobbs had turned out to be intriguing in her own right, and not just as the daughter of the Minnesota Shrike.

2021

Will swallowed and looked at the file again. He blinked and looked over at Jack, who was already plotting the three murders Bev Katz had linked together, on the wall map.

Will looked back down at the file, the colours flickering somewhat but there all the same.

This sounder of kills were the Ripper's. Il Mostro.

He was killing again and Will could read the message in them so clearly. He looked up to the map again, noting the triangle that the tableau sites made. Surely he wouldn't be so sloppy as triangulate his position? Surely he'd give Will more credit than that.

Will flicked through the pages.

"What is it Will?" Katz asked. They'd worked a lot of cases together before, more so when she'd been in the labs. Now as a field agent she was excelling and Will couldn't help but worry about what that could mean for himself and for the Ripper.

"Nothing," Will closed the file but she quirked her brow at him and he knew he had to say something. "Maybe he's working in a radias, we should check out the area within the triangle." Will replied, his gut feeling that the Ripper really wasn't that stupid.

Which apparently was Bev's feeling too.

"Sounds a bit sloppy for the Ripper," Bev frowned.

"I think he might be onto something," Jack interjected, still looking at the map. "Well, it's definitely something we should eliminate off the bat either way."

Katz shrugged but was clearly not convinced.

“Well, I have a class to teach.” Will said, packing the files into his bag to go over later, determined to find something to locate the Ripper before Bev Katz and the rest of the FBI did.

2021

“Hannibal?” He heard Abigail call out, her voice echoing through the empty foyer.

“Here,” He called back from the kitchen where he was packing a few items. Her expression was questioning as she wandered in, taking stock of the mostly packed up house.

“What’s going on?” She asked tentatively.

“My apologies Abigail, I’ve had a personal emergency that requires me to return to Europe. I’m not quite sure how long for.” He tried to keep his tone matter of fact as he wrapped some of the fine china teacups.

“And you weren’t going to tell me?” She crossed her arms and frowned at him, a defensive posture made all the more commanding by the FBI badge hanging at her belt.

“I’m telling you now. I… must admit that I wrote an email to you several times but couldn’t send it. I wanted to do this in person. We’ve grown close over the last couple of years…” Hannibal drifted off, seeing the hurt in her face.

He often wondered, when he looked at Abigail, what might have become of Mischa. They had a similar fiery spirit. And once Alana had returned from sabbatical and resumed therapy with Abigail, they’d stayed in touch and met often. He wasn’t dumb to the fact that she had come to look up on him, even rely upon him a little, in a fatherly way. It was a connection he’d never sought nor thought to want. But Abigail’s presence in his life had unexpectedly filled something of the gap left by Mischa.

“Where are you going?” She asked quietly, realising there was no argument to be had even in her sadness.

“Lithuania initially. Paris, to sort some affairs. I expect to settle in Florence for a while.” He hesitated, looking down at the teacup in his hands before continuing, “You’d always be welcome to visit.”

She cleared her throat and looked down, “Maybe. It’s not like… I can’t get vacation right now. So we’ll see.”

He nodded his understanding. She was still cutting her teeth in field work. He was just incredibly glad that she was not involved with the team that had him almost cornered. The ones who had studied his sounders and looked in the wrong place. And then they had looked in the right place, the place he’d hoped his soulmate would find him before the FBI did. Each tableau had been a clue in itself, recreating paintings that he’d hoped would read as a message when put together correctly. He just needed a reply back, so that he knew for sure his soulmate understood, and then he would make a clear statement.

But there was nothing, no more communication, no more love notes by murder. Just the threat of the FBI circling ever closer.

He was careful, he was thorough. But they were, for now, too close for comfort. He had been reckless in trying to let his soulmate find him, but he had known this risk and now he had to accept the consequences. And right now, that was leaving before they got any closer. He would have his chance again another day, he was sure.

Hannibal placed down the teacup and walked over to Abigail. She didn't resist as he folded her into a fatherly hug, petting her hair as she sighed out her annoyance and pain.

"The offer is always open. Anytime you want to come visit."

2034

"How do you feel about dog sitting?" Will asked with a near grimace.

Abigail rolled her eyes at him, "For how long?"

That was a good question. He didn't have a chance to reply before she asked, "Are you going to Europe again?"

Will felt his cheeks burn, and was glad they were sitting in the near darkness on his porch, a dog in each of their laps. It was one of his regular nights to have Abigail over for dinner and she'd had a hard few days, which Will was understanding of, so she'd decided to have some whiskey and stay over. She'd drive back to the city in the morning, and he'd see her again the next time. It was a routine they had fallen into over the years.

"Yes," He mumbled into his glass. This would be the fourth trip in five years, and whilst she teased him about going to soak up some much needed culture, he was sure she thought he had a lover waiting for him over there.

The truth was, four times now he'd seen reports, articles, mentions on the Interpol website, that flickered with bright colours. Il Mostro had returned to the continent after Will had failed to locate him before the FBI drew too close, that much he was sure of. And then there was a kill in Vilnius, Lithuania. Then another just across the border in Belarus. Another in Paris. This one was in Italy and Will had already booked his ticket for two days time. Each time over the years there had been no further clues, he hadn't got there quick enough to glean more, even though he was sure each was a message.

I am still here. I am still alive. Do you see me?

"Where are you off to this time, and do I have time to go home and pack a few things? Or is this where you tell me I'm driving you to the airport at dawn?" Her tone was exasperated but she couldn't quite hide her smirk.

"Italy, and I'm leaving in two days. I have an airport service booked, and I can kennel the dogs but…"

"Don't be daft, Will. You'll know I'll always come and hang out with the puppies," She scratched the head of the little one on her lap, "besides gives me a break from my flatmate."

"Ha! Well I'm glad I can help out with that then." Will smiled and scratched behind the ears of the dog in his own lap as they relaxed.

“Where in Italy?” Abigail asked.

“Florence,” Will mumbled, knowing what was going to come next.

Abigail swivelled in her chair and gawped at him.

“Will!”

“Abigail!”

She huffed at him, “You know my friend lives there. You guys could hang out! I think you’d hit it off.”

She’d told him this many times before. In fact every time she’d gone to visit her friend Hannibal, she’d said how well they’d hit it off. But everything she ever told him about the man made him sound like an absolute stuck up asshole and Will really didn’t have time for people like that.

And, yes maybe there was some jealousy there. Will and Abigail had become family over the years and he knew that she saw her ex-therapist as sort of a surrogate dad. He couldn’t deny a little bitterness over that, given how he’d come to pretty much think of her as a daughter over the years.

“Look, if I give you his number, will you at least consider calling him whilst you’re there?”

Will sighed, “Abi… I’m only going for a few days. I have things to do…”

“Pleeeeease,” she turned the puppy dog eyes on him.

Will let out a heavy sigh. “Fine. But I’m not promising anything. I actually do have plans already.”

Abigail beamed an excited grin at him that made her look as young as the first day they met. He felt bad that he really had absolutely no inclination to get in touch with her friend despite her insistence.

2039

“Abigail, I’m so sorry,” Hannibal said the moment Abigail opened the door to her little house. She nodded and opened the door fully, letting him walk in before she collapsed into him and he folded his arms around her.

“It’s okay,” She sobbed against his chest. “Thanks for coming.”

“I apologise. I couldn’t get here sooner. After my flight was cancelled it was difficult to get connections to line up.” Hannibal stroked her hair, trying to contain the anger he felt with the airlines. She was one of the few things that made him emotionally vulnerable and in a way that made him angrier still. “Did the funeral go okay?”

“Yes, thank you…” She sobbed again and he could feel her tears soaking through his shirt.

“I’m sorry I wasn’t here to hold your hand through it.” Hannibal muttered against her hair and then pressed a kiss there. He had never really gotten to know her mother much, but he was as close to Abigail as he presumed he might ever have been to his own child if he’d had any. It gave him pain to think that she had to go through the sudden loss of her mother alone.

“It’s okay, Will’s been here for me. He took some time off work and I went and stayed with him after…” She took in a shaky breath.

Hannibal couldn’t help the huff he let out at the mention of Will’s name, despite everything. Or maybe because of everything the other man did for Abigail.

At least that made Abigail chuckle and she pulled back to look at him with her weak smile and tear stained face.

“You’re both so damn jealous of each other and yet, I think you’d really get along if you met.” She scalded playfully.

He huffed again, “Really Abigail,” Hannibal couldn’t help the indignation given everything she’d ever relayed about the man. “By your own admission he is antisocial, grumpy, scruffy, lives in a house full of dogs... none of these things make me think we would be fast friends.”

Hannibal was glad at least that pulled laugh from her and she shook her head. “You’re both obstinate and both the smartest people I know. I think you’re just scared to meet him because you might have met your match. Someone you won’t always win an argument with.” She teased.

Hannibal’s lips tweaked into the smallest of smiles for just a moment even as he shook his head.

Will Graham, former FBI Agent, former Quantico Lecturer, former Police Officer and lover of dogs, did indeed seem quite interesting, Hannibal had to admit that. But for many years now he’d been disinclined to bother with those he might find interesting, still waiting for a chance to find the person he knew would be of the greatest interest to him. The one that made him see colours.

Abigail studied him for a moment and then pulled on a strand of his hair that had come loose during their embrace, “Almost white.”

“I think it looks distinguished.” Hannibal retorted and Abigail smiled affectionately.

“It’s good to see you, thank you for coming.”

“Anything for you Abigail, you know that.” Hannibal replied before embracing her again. She must know that, given his years of mentorship. His honing of her skills.

His perfect little hunter.

2040

“Don’t lift that, Will…” Abigail raced over and took the box from his hands. “That one’s really heavy.” She set it back on the table and pointed at the sofa. “We need a break anyway.”

They’d been moving a few boxes and cases from her old rental house into the new one she’d just bought, and Will wasn’t about to be bossed around like a doddering old fool.

“I’m not an invalid you know!” He grumbled, despite the shooting pain in his leg.

She just glared at him in that way he had. “Alright, *Grandpa*!” The remark was playfully snide and he huffed at her.

“You’re not too old to get a belt you know!” He muttered.

“Will!” She admonished whilst cracking up with laughter.

“I’m sixty five not a hundred,” He continued to mutter as he grabbed his cane and half limped back over to the sofa and dropped down into it. “And! I’ll have you know that this is all down to an injury I sustained at the FBI. In the line of duty! Just exacerbated by age… You take that on board as a lesson!” He held back from pointing his cane at her to make the point, as he knew she’d only give him shit for that too.

She continued to giggle at his expense as she moved a box into the kitchen and returned just as he was trying to pull out one of the boxes next to the sofa, to add to the main pile. Just as she entered it tipped and a few files spilled onto the floor, instantly recognisable as FBI case files. Just like the ones he used to bring home when he was working cases.

“What’s this?” Will picked up the top file that had spilled out slightly and swallowed, trying to keep his voice level as he watched the bright colours surge across the page.

“Oh shit,” Abigail grabbed the file from his hand and slid it back into the box. “Homework.” She replied with a smile.

“You’re researching the Chesapeake Ripper?” Will asked. “Outdated reading surely?”

Abigail turned and looked at him with a puzzled frown. “That was… How did you know that was the Ripper, Will?”

Will returned her frown, “What are you talking about. I studied him for years before he stopped hunting in the US.”

Abigail took the file back out and handed it to him, an eyebrow raised.

Will let the file fall open and realised his mistake. It was a fresh murder. The crime scene photos dated only a week earlier. And much like those when he was in Europe, the tableau’s message was clear.

I’m alive. I’m here. See?

Will swallowed and blinked, “I… I’d recognise his MO anywhere. I didn’t just do the filing when I worked for the FBI you know! Or were you suspecting I’d gone senile?” He quirked a brow back at her and she smirked and shook her head. He looked over the file, taking it in. The colours, the meaning. “He’s killing again?”

“Yeah.” Abigail replied, dropping next to him on the sofa and pulling the file into her lap. “And I’m on the case. Main theory right now is some sort of protege. It’s too specific to be a copycat, but the man must be… I’m mean he’d be an old man right now. How could someone-”

“There you go, underestimating your seniors again,” Will jabbed with a raised brow.

“Huh,” She laughed, “Well, maybe. But I think a protege is more likely. Anyway, this is the second kill. He always kills in sounders of three, so unless we work out his next victim or, god forbid catch him after the fact, then our chance is missed again.”

“Hmm,” Will responded thoughtfully and sat back in the chair, unable to help but consider that he might have missed these messages altogether had it not been for having Abigail in his life. They

made him feel a wave of hope that he hadn't felt in years.

"Anyway," She folded the file again and changed the subject, "Thanks for helping me with the move, not the best time for my car to end up in the shop."

"Anything for you Abi, you know that." Will smiled and squeezed her knee, happy to see her sweet smile in return.

"Hannibal offered to get a moving service, but I always feel so weird about spending other people's money," She sighed.

Will huffed, "I wouldn't feel bad about spending his money. Least he could do considering he upped and moved away after letting you believe he felt something familial for you."

"Will," Abigail scalded, "I never expected him, or even you, to hold up your life and stick around just because we bonded. I mean… I think of you both much like my dads, but that doesn't give me a right to expect you to always be here."

"Oh," it was the only thing Will could reply, a lump rising in his throat at Abigail's admission of her feelings towards him. She'd never said it so plainly before, not in all these years. "Abi, you're very much like a daughter to me. I hope you know that, and I'm not going anywhere." He hesitated to add, unlike Hannibal, under his breath but knew she'd only get mad again.

Abigail laughed and slung an arm around him, pulling him into a side hug.

"Thanks *dad*," she replied affectionately before letting go and standing up to put the file back in the box once more. "And anyways, I'm sure I told you, Hannibal moved home last year."

Will rolled his eyes at the mention of the man's name and just managed to stop himself from bitching about Mr Moneybags not being here to help in person like he was. Abigail would only get shitty with him.

2041

Hannibal took a deep breath, regretting that there was little he could deny Abigail, essentially his surrogate daughter. After all, she had been there for him over the years as he had futilely attempted to find The Bayou Butcher.

But this was the last thing he ever thought that he would be doing. Finally meeting with the dog loving, scruffy, ex-FBI agent that she'd told him so often about. Her other father figure.

Hannibal sneered at the thought of how this man could have any role in Abigail's life. He had been something of a mentor through the FBI Academy, but how that connection deepened was something he'd never understand.

Or perhaps it was merely jealousy.

But he had let Abigail persuade him. He had realised very quickly she'd been trying to set him up and when she'd admitted it, he'd huffed but decided to go along. Knowing as she did that his soulmate was apparently out of reach, she wanted him to have friends, or more. She wanted him, specifically, to become friends with her other father figure. Sometimes he felt like they were her divorced parents.

Hannibal sighed. He sometimes wished he'd never seen that news article. The one he had clipped and pressed in his safe. And as it grew decades older, Abigail wanted him to move on. She wanted the lonely old man in her life to meet the other lonely old man in her life. And he'd finally given in.

He huffed again and picked up his wine, not needing to look at his watch to know the man was already late.

"Rude," He muttered under his breath before taking a sip.

*

Will let out an angry growl as he tried to free his cane from the paving outside the restaurant. The sort of place he'd never normally be caught dead, and yet he was sure it was still a step down market from *rich dad*, as he'd started to think of Hannibal Lecter.

He couldn't believe, after years of pestering, that he'd finally agreed to do this. And to be honest, it had only been because she'd ended the request with "dad." She'd never called him that before in a non-jokey way, and he'd never expected it despite feeling in his heart like they were family.

She sure knew how to manipulate him.

And he had to wonder if she was right to push him. He'd been alone so long and had never shared the information about the soulmate he seemed destined to never meet. But he seriously doubted he was about to find any kind of connection, friendship or more, with *rich dad*. This was yet another thing he did to humour his surrogate daughter so that she'd get off his back.

He would go along, have a terrible time, let moneybags pick up the bill, and then tell her that at least he'd tried.

If he could ever get into the damn place.

Pulling his cane free, he winced at the pressure it had put on his leg, and limped towards the door.

This was already a disaster. He was already late and he just really didn't care. He was on the verge of turning and walking out when the maître d′ came over and greeted him.

"I'm uh, meeting someone. Doctor Lecter, he's probably here already." Will grumbled.

"Certainly, sir. This way," The man indicated the main restaurant and lead the way.

Will followed behind him, realising there was something not quite right and looking down to see that his cane had gotten a little gnarled from the fight with the uneven paving. He was muttering expletives under his breath as he strode forward as best he could whilst watching his cane to make sure he didn't fall on his ass.

"Your table, sir." The maître d′ said, and Will looked up.

He could barely contain the gasped breath. "Hannibal Lecter?" Will asked, his heart suddenly racing enough to concern him about the chances of a heart attack.

"Will Graham…" Lecter replied breathily and looked Will up and down. And he knew exactly what the man saw.

Colour.

Vivid, bold colours. First starting with the man in front of him and slowly spilling out, painting the rest of the world.

They both looked at each other for a moment, taking it all in, before Will said, “That suit and tie combo is pretty gaudy.”

Lecter frowned, tilted his head, and then a smile spread across his lips.

*

“Oh fuck,” Will growled as his leg pained. Unsurprisingly considering Hannibal had pretty much slammed him against the wall. The man was pretty strong considering his age.

They hadn’t eaten dinner. They’d barely made it through a glass of wine, sitting there watching each other across the table. Mesmerised.

The room was washed in colour and they were the most vivid of all. So Will hadn’t hesitated when Hannibal had asked if he should ask the maître d′ to call a car and retire to his home.

“Are you alright?” Hannibal asked, pulling back and panting.

“Old injury… It’s okay. Don’t be gentle,” Will panted the words as he grabbed the collar of Hannibal’s ridiculously pretentious suit and pulled him back into another heated kiss.

Hannibal growled against his lips and it was all Will could do to stay upright as he felt them both stirring in their pants.

“You’re beautiful,” Hannibal breathed the words against his mouth and Will laughed.

“Really?” He replied, nipping kisses at Hannibal’s lips as he spoke, “I know you refer to me as ‘the scruffy dad’, Abigail told me.”

“Let me make that up to you,” Hannibal rumbled the words and ground their hips together.

“Oh fuck…” Will moaned again, “I don’t want you to think I’m an easy lay.” He chuckled.

“I don’t generally do this on first dates either, but I believe we’d both be forgiven for making an exception.” Hannibal replied against Will’s neck, nipping and kissing.

“Wasn’t much of a date,” Will jokingly grumbled.

Hannibal pulled back and started to step away, fisting his hand into the side of Will’s shirt to pull him along as he backed through the house. Will limped slowly along with him, feeling his heart and his cock throbbing with each step. He wasn’t sure he’d been this turned on in decades.

“Not… Not the stairs,” Will said as he saw them nearing, embarrassed. But it seemed a lesser embarrassment than attempting a flight of stairs with his leg pain still so flared up.

Hannibal pulled him close and kissed him again, deeply and languidly before shifting to the side and manoeuvring them into a room instead.

It appeared to be a study or a home office, completely indulgent and just as gaudy as Hannibal's suit.

Will took it all in as Hannibal gently moved him to the grandiose sofa and lay him down on it.

"You might want to reconsider some of your colour schemes now," Will commented, to which he received a raised eyebrow and a quick look up and down.

Hannibal was apparently determined to ignore him as he leaned down and kissed him thoroughly whilst reaching his hand down and palming Will's cock through his trousers.

"Are you quite comfortable Will? Is this okay?" Hannibal looked at him so deeply Will wanted to melt.

"This is perfect," Will replied without even a hint of sarcasm.

Hannibal smiled again and stood, "I'll be back in a moment." He said, and then turned and left.

*

Hannibal was glad that he had kept himself in shape over the years or there might have been at least four times so far this evening that he would have had a coronary.

He trembled as he made his way to his bedroom and opened the door. Not even caring that he could see everything in such technicolor now. As amazing as it was as a phenomenon, it was nothing compared to finally finding The Bayou Butcher, The Virginia Lure.

Will Graham. His soulmate.

Hannibal let out a shuddering breath as he went to his ensuite and removed the lube and condoms from a drawer they had sat in for much too long.

It hadn't taken Hannibal long to prepare himself in his bathroom. He enjoyed being fingered, but rarely found it necessary for penetration other than to slip a little lube in. The thought of Will finger fucking him was quite erotic but right now he wanted something more. Something immediate.

And he had consideration of Will's leg too. Perhaps when he was in less pain they could play with each other more. But Hannibal found that, despite his advanced years, he felt like they had all the time in the world now they'd found each other.

He dressed in his robe and returned to the study, lube and condoms in pocket, to find Will had shimmied his trousers and underwear down to his thighs and was stroking himself slowly, eyes closed as he bit at his lower lip.

The sight made Hannibal pause in the doorway.

Not only had he never seen anyone naked in these true colours before, but he'd also never seen any sight as beautiful as a partially nude Will Graham.

"You're breathtaking," Hannibal said, not knowing any other way to describe him.

At that Will opened his eyes, the light making them look something between blue and green. It did indeed steal Hannibal's breath again.

Will held out a hand and Hannibal went to him.

“I don’t know… what you want? I know I’d like us both to come, I think I’ve been holding in an orgasm with your name on it for a few decades now.” Will chuckled.

“I want you inside me,” Hannibal said bluntly, not really sure there was any other way to say it. And certainly it was clearly arousing to Will, who groaned, bit his lip again and then squeezed his penis at the base as though to stave off that orgasm.

“How do-” Will started, but Hannibal grabbed one of the small sofa cushions, dropped it on the floor and then slowly sank to his knees, stopping Will in his tracks. He winced as his knees pained and cracked, age having taken its toll, and welcomed the soft support of the cushion as he leaned in and took Will into his mouth.

“Oh god,” Will keened, his hips rising a little even as he let out a gasp of pain at the motion. A hand shot into Hannibal’s hair and gripped tighter than was really comfortable. He continued nonetheless, taking Will as deep as he could and hollowing his cheeks, sucking and licking until Will was even harder than he had been.

Hannibal sat back on his haunches with another wince and stroked Will’s cock a couple of times before pulling out the condom and ripping open the packet. He enjoyed the way he felt Will tremble under his hands as he rolled on the condom and then lubed him up.

It took Hannibal a moment to get purchase enough on the sofa to pull himself back off the floor and straddle over Will. He took hold of his cock as he lowered, not hesitating in sinking on the man completely until they were totally conjoined.

“Oh fuuuuck,” Will groaned, and took a tight grip of Hannibal’s hips as Hannibal began to slowly rock.

He leaned over and kissed Will, light pecks against his lips as he balanced himself.

“Let me know if you’re uncomfortable or in pain Will.”

Will closed his eyes tight shut and nodded, though Hannibal suspected he’d do neither. He’d brave the pain to have this, because Hannibal would do the same.

As it was his joints ached and the stretch of Will inside him was painful but bearable. Easing by the moment as he grew accustomed to something it had been a long time since experiencing.

And it had never been like this before. No one had ever felt like Will. It felt right, it felt like a connection right through to his soul. Looking down at him, Will was radiant. Colours and light and a presence that seemed almost ethereal. It was more than he could have ever believed.

They moved together, barely more than rocking though that seemed enough, after everything, to bring them both quickly to the edge.

He felt Will trying to thrust up into him, heard the hiss of pain as he did so.

"It's alright…" He muttered against Will's ear before starting to pull up before sinking down once more. Fucking himself on Will's cock as the man beneath him moaned and went near pliant, his grip on Hannibal's hips loosening.

"Oh fuck… Hannibal… nggg…" Will let out little grunts and moans as Hannibal rode him hard, ignoring the little twinge in his back as he leaned down and took Will's mouth again.

They kissed like starved men, consuming each other. Will's hands moved up to his face, holding him there as he plundered Hannibal's mouth in synchronisation with the rest of their bodies.

With every shudder of Will's body, Hannibal knew he was unlikely to last much longer. He reached between them and began to jerk his own cock, a mistake really because within moments he was at the very edge, unable to help but clench around Will as he tried to stave off his orgasm.

Will grunted, and with a final effort, he released Hannibal's face and gripped his hips again, gritting his teeth as he slammed up into Hannibal - meeting each of Hannibal's downward thrusts as Hannibal continued to work his own cock.

A minute later they were both crying out.

Hannibal spilled all over Will's stomach - the lower half a little exposed but mostly hitting his pale shirt, as Will filled the condom inside Hannibal. Both of them groaned and rode the aftershocks of their joint climax until it became too much.

Hannibal held the base of Will's cock, condom in place, and lifted off of him. But that was the last of the energy he had, collapsing onto Will's chest, both now sticky with sweat and come in ways Hannibal was sure he hadn't been for quite a number of years. They panted together and Will's arms came up around him.

"Il Mostro," Will whispered reverently against Hannibal's ear, nuzzling into him as they both drifted into a nap.

*

The colours of morning were so new to Will's eyes that they dazzled where light spilled through the curtains they had neglected to close when they'd woken in the middle of the night and made it up to the bedroom. The sun seemed to catch on every surface and make it glow.

It was mesmerising. And truly the first time he'd allowed himself to take it all, as preoccupied as he'd been the previous evening. It was like waking for the first time.

His gaze finally landed on the two framed pictures on Hannibal's nightstand, one black and white - reminding Will of how he used to see the world - the other full colour. The older photo, a little ragged and age-stained, was of a little girl, a toddler. The other was a photo of Abigail pulling a face as she clearly sat opposite the photographer at a restaurant table. It brought a smile to Will's face, wondering how long Hannibal tried to get a *nice* photo of Abi and having to settle with this. One that captured her spirit perfectly.

Will felt Hannibal stir then and couldn't help but snuggle into the man as he continued to smile at the colourful picture of Abi, like a daughter to them both.

“I taught her to fish,” Will said, idly playing his fingers through grey chest hair as the man’s eyes flickered open.

“I taught her to hunt,” Hannibal replied in a sleep heavy voice, and Will knew his meaning instantly. All these years he’d had a connection with her and he’d seen this in her the first time she

came to his office. When she came to ask for his help. And he'd ignored it, buried it, so that it was something that Jack Crawford could never get from him, knowing the man's suspicions when her father was discovered.

Realisation dawned, from this conversation or that over the decades, that Abigail knew what he was. What he'd done. What he did. The thought made him sigh with relief.

"Well," Hannibal continued, "I should say that I built upon and corrected the lessons of her biological father.

"A protege," Will mused, remembering Abigail's words. What she had tried to tell him. She had helped Hannibal with his last sounders, possibly with others. She had known he was seeking his soulmate, and though she may never have suspected it to be Will, she had set them up either way knowing this one thing they had in common.

"A daughter," Hannibal corrected, pressing a kiss to Will's dark grey curls.

2042

"A trinket for you," Hannibal handed over the lightly wrapped item he'd purchased in the Florence marketplace he'd visited whilst Will had sipped coffee on their balcony. "It reminded me of you."

"A lamb?" Will chuckled, as he removed the little china animal from the paper, "is that how you see me?"

Hannibal smiled and gave a slight shake of his head, trying to indicate he was so much more. He saw Will as so many things. A vengeful killer. A fallen angel, like himself. The mongoose he wanted under his house when the snakes slithered by. The wolf or the lamb?

Blood-soaked and vicious.

He'd have loved to see the Butcher in his prime, but settled for the older man he'd loved the moment he laid eyes upon him. The man he'd, short weeks ago, consummated with on another level with a joint kill. A tableau all their own. One that Abigail had scalded them for as she buried even the remotest possible leads to keep them off the radar of Director Starling.

He couldn't say he regretted it. One last kill for them both before retirement with each other.

"A lamb of God," Hannibal wrapped his arms around Will and murmured the words next to his ear, "But one cloaked under your false air of innocence and sacrifice. And above all else, wrathful."

He felt Will shudder against him.

"You see through my mask, my person suit." Will practically sighed, "You know, that's kind of romantic." He turned and smiled at Hannibal. A smile so full of colour that it resonated through every fibre of his being.

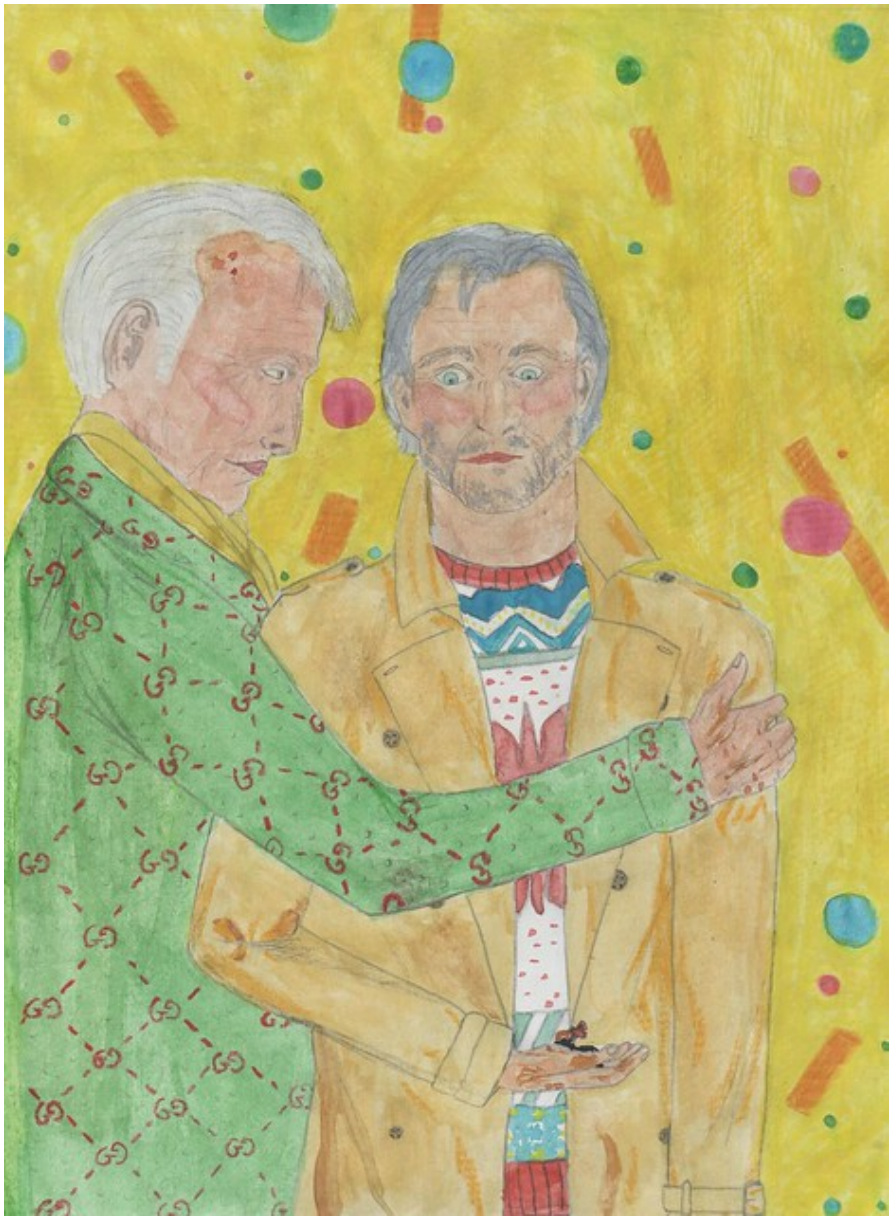
"I try mylismas," Hannibal pressed a kiss to Will's temple.

Will grumbled in that way he had. A way that suggested he disliked the attention, though Hannibal knew that wasn't true. He was just a grump. One that Hannibal loved wholeheartedly.

Will pulled away and walked over to his hand luggage, gently placing it inside ready for their trip home in a few weeks. For now they would enjoy their European adventures, revisiting Hannibal's past together. Their final stop would be Palermo, and Hannibal found his heart keening at the thought.

He thought of the other little gift in his own luggage. Not so much a gift. A promise.

He thought ahead to the Norman Chapel and the question he wanted to ask Will once they were there. How beautiful, how radiant the man would look in his warm and rich colours, with a gold band on his finger.



End Notes

BTW - the Edward Hopper reference is a nod to this tweet from Bryan

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